



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Day 3 Press Conference Following the Third Round

Head Coach Jack Del Rio

Coach Del Rio Opening Statement: "I just wanted to touch on a couple of points before we open up and take questions. I think, for us, we're still busy right now as the draft is coming to a close. We're getting into the college free agent process, and that's an important time as well. Every year when I was a head coach, and I know each of the last couple of years with [General Manager] Reggie [McKenzie] here, free agents have made the team and have contributed, so this is an important time as well. This has been a very productive offseason. Our free agency was sound and solid and we acquired some really good players, strengthened our team, made it more competitive, and then we feel like we come out of this draft weekend feeling good about the work that went into it and the way it laid out for us and the fact we were able to acquire some really good players that are excited to be Raiders. It was a good process and we had a good weekend. I think on top of that, when you look at the facility upgrades and some of the things that we've got going on right now, it's a great time to be a Raider, so I'm excited to be leading the franchise. I think you saw early in this draft, it was big, versatile, smart, tough guys. As the draft went on, we hit an area where we ended up being – three consecutive linebackers went off, one that's probably going to play defensive end. As we got to the later part of the draft, including some of those linebackers, depth and special teams value come into play. We drafted a returner late. Really, a lot of the targets that we went into in terms of needs matched up in certain areas with the value of the board, and that's how we put together our draft weekend. But I think it was a very strong effort and I'm really pleased with the way the coaching staff and the scouting staff worked together and had a strong performance."

Q: What did you like about the linebackers Ben Heeney and Neiron Ball? Is Ball a possibility at strong safety, or strictly as a linebacker?

Coach Del Rio: "Yeah, Neiron is a linebacker, a very versatile linebacker who can really play on the line or off the ball. He's in the 235- to 240-pound range. He's probably built similarly to Ray-Ray Armstrong in terms of his length and size and speed. And Heeney's a real productive player, a smart guy, a tough guy, a fast guy. We feel like he can come in and impact special teams, for sure, right away, but we'll allow – all these guys will get a chance to come in here and compete and earn their way. We won't put a lid on them."

Q: Trading down twice in the fourth round, were you guys looking for some extra picks or was that just how the board played out?

Coach Del Rio: "Yeah, I would say that there was an opportunity to move down and we saw some depth in the board and took advantage of that opportunity to slide down a little bit and pick up some picks."

Q: How did you guys balance staying true to your draft board and taking the best available player, while simultaneously filling your needs?

Coach Del Rio: "You have to realize when you come into it, you can't always fulfill every need that you maybe go into – or every person on the wish list – but I thought, for the most part, we were disciplined in terms of staying with value and working the board from that standpoint. Yeah, I think there's always that question: 'Are you addressing need?' You certainly have to at some point, but are you taking value? And I think in particular, early, I think we had great value early, and then as it goes on in the draft cycle and you start working where there are many people across the board, then it certainly makes sense to address needs specifically."

Q: You drafted a couple of kids with pretty significant life issues in their background – serious illnesses, poverty when they were young, things like that. I know you're trying to find talent, not good stories, but does that kind of perseverance make an impact on you?

Coach Del Rio: "Well, I think it can. I think one of the things that we covet is guys that have grit, guys that have a chip on their shoulder, something to prove. There is some purpose to them and why they go about things and why



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they attack things and all of that. I know there are some unique stories, some very touching stories. We didn't seek those out, but we are aware of several of those stories."

Q: When you took Amari Cooper, you got a receiver that can do just about everything. Your tight end is also both a blocker and receiver. Today, all of the linebackers and offensive linemen you took said they could play any of the positions in their unit. Are you seeking out that kind of versatility, and how valuable is it?

Coach Del Rio: "We do. I think each of them kind of have a different story. I think with the tight end, Clive [Walford], he's a complete tight end. Are you a blocking tight end or a receiving tight end? We think he's both. He can do both. In terms of Jon [Feliciano] and his offensive line experience, he's played center, he's played guard, he's played tackle. So yeah, that's great versatility. Certainly, that weighs into it as part of the process. These guys are capable of being more than just a guy that's limited to one specific role, one specific situation where he can thrive. That helped them in terms of their status with us."

Q: You took Anthony Morris out of Tennessee State and Dexter McDonald of Kansas. What did you see from them?

Coach Del Rio: "Anthony, a big athletic guy, I had him in for a visit. We feel like he has room to grow and develop. Being taken late like that, coming from a small school, there's a lot of development ability there. We feel like if we get our hands on him, then we could potentially help him grow into something bigger and better. He may have an opportunity to really develop into a real player. So you take shots on guys later in the draft like that, that you think have upside and have the ability to develop and we'll work hard at that. In terms of Dexter, he's a talented corner that, you know, there's some reasons that he needed up sliding a little bit in terms of where his talent is and where he was picked. There's a little bit of a gap there, so it'll be up to him to make sure that he comes in, he's a good teammate, he practices hard, he does the right things and he approaches things the right way to give himself a chance to be his best, because when he's at his best, doing the things he should do, he's a pretty good football player."

Q: You guys didn't take a defensive back until the seventh round. Is that a vote of confidence in the guys you already have on the team?

Coach Del Rio: "I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't also say that I don't want to give them a vote of confidence, but I think for us, we wanted to make it competitive at a lot of different spots. We are going through the college free agent process right now and we will be adding some players at those positions, and they will be given a chance to compete. We want to make it a really competitive roster. We want there to be genuine competition. We did the best we could to do that. We definitely feel like we strengthened ourselves this weekend and look forward to getting our hands on these guys and getting to work."

Q: What do you see as Max Valles' potential and what did you like about him in his two years at school?

Coach Del Rio: "He was a guy that I think had nine or 10 sacks this year. He's got a little bit of production in a major conference. He's got some size and ability off the edge. We just felt like at that point in the draft, he was somebody we were willing to take a shot on and get a good look at and give him an opportunity to come in here and compete and see if he can do something off the edge of our defense. Obviously, if you're still involved down low like that, there is a reason that you slid down the board. We'll try and help him grow through some of those things and become a kind of player that can help us."

Q: Were there any particular positions that you had a few guys that you really liked that never worked out in the areas that you wanted to address?

Coach Del Rio: "Yeah, I think if you had just given us the first nine players in the draft, we would have been fine. Just call it a day. *(laughter)* It just doesn't work that way. We grade a lot of these players. You go through the work and the tape in the evaluation process and all the background checks, all the character checks, all the different things that you do to get prepared for this weekend. There are some really talented that you watch go by, watch somebody else take them and put them on their team. We feel good about the process, the way it worked out for



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us. Certainly, you don't get every player that you go into the weekend saying, 'Boy, it would be great if we could somehow manage to get that guy.' But we like the guys that we did get."

Q: With Andre Debose, he didn't travel with his team to the bowl game last year. Was that a red flag for you guys?

Coach Del Rio: "All of those kinds of things are talked about, discussed and worked through. So, we did that and the guys that we have joining our football team, we're comfortable with."

Q: It seemed like the Southeast scout won a lot of the arguments with a lot of Florida guys in the draft. Can you talk a little bit about the scouting process? It also seems like a lot of the selections had connections to Sal Sunseri. How much did you rely on him and his knowledge?

Coach Del Rio: "[College scout] Zack [Crockett] was a popular scout up there. *(laughter)* That's a piece of it. He and [defensive line coach] Jethro [Franklin]. Jethro was at Miami, Sal was at Florida State. We have players from both programs and certainly they [coached] and recruited a lot of those young men as well. That's a part of it. We're obviously tied in when you have a couple of guys that are straight out of the college ranks. The recruiting and the relationships with the players, relationships with coaches, the ability to get really good, detailed information and those things are all there. So, we utilize that. But, it just worked out where we had some really good players come out of the area they had just left. Sal wasn't running the draft board up there." *(laughter)*

Q: As young men coming from a college program, how does it feel to have Joe Gomes and his staff to work close with them and make that leap to the next level successful?

Coach Del Rio: "I feel great about the entire staff. Having Joe Gomes and his staff come in has been a very important part of the process, what we have underway here, in terms of nutrition, in terms of the facilities and the weight room and what we're doing with those guys, the routines, the things that we're exposing them to and the different things we're doing with the training and the conditioning, the body composition – all of those things. He has taken that to another level. I think all of our guys will benefit from that, so he has done a great job. I feel really good about the coaching staff. [Special teams coordinator] Brady Seely is an excellent special teams coach and [offensive coordinator] Bill Musgrave and the offensive staff, [defensive coordinator] Kenny Norton, [Jr.] and the defensive staff, I feel like we'll be able to develop some of our own players – some of the guys that are here, that were here, being in a competitive environment. We feel like we will develop a couple of guys that are here to be better and then along with adding some players along through free agency and through the draft, we expect to be a much better football team."

Q: Mario Edwards Jr. had said you guys told him he might play the Leo position. What type of role do you envision for him?

Coach Del Rio: "Yeah, I'm not sure which of our coaches got carried away with disclosing what we're going to do with him before I could tell him to button it up. *(laughing)* We'll address that. We're going to get him here and plug him in and let him learn to play defensive end, defensive tackle, Leo, closed end, whatever it is we decide makes the most sense for us and for him. We think he's a really good football player. We're looking forward to getting our hands on him and getting to work."

Q: Do you look at the character more when a guy has had some adversity in his past, projecting what kind of player he will be more than what they were in college?

Coach Del Rio: "Well, I think you look at both. I think you're looking for productivity; it's not a bad thing. You have a guy like Amari with excellent production, and so that's a positive. Then you have some guys that didn't maybe put up the kind of numbers that you know they're capable of, so you're looking at other factors. So I think we look at the whole package. We look at these guys in a total package. What do they bring? Character, playing time, the tape is always really important, the workouts are important, the background checks and all the work that goes into putting our board together – it's all a part of the process. Like I said, we feel really good about the young men that are joining us."



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Q: Now that the draft is complete, analysts will go back and grade every team. What grade would you give yourself and your staff?

Coach Del Rio: "I'm more worried about how we grade out in September when we start playing games. Right now, I know it was a good, solid effort. I think we've had a lot of good solid efforts and we're just trying to put together one day after another, make it a great day one day after another. This is, I think, an excellent weekend for us and just one step along the way in this process of building this organization back where it belongs."